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Abstract of the Disclosure

A method and apparatus block the reception of television programming which meets specified criteria. Data packets describing television programming are broadcast with the television signal. The data packets include at least packets which contain category information specifying a level in one or more multi-level categories and/or label information specifying labels applied to the program content of the signal. Data packets in an incoming video signal are detected by a blocking apparatus and compared to preferences stored in non-volatile memory in the blocking apparatus. If the contents of the data packets match or exceed the stored preferences then the video signal is blocked. The apparatus is field configurable. Configuration information specifying the rating scheme is transmitted to the apparatus. The methods of the invention are extremely flexible and allow several different rating systems to be used simultaneously.